

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Florida Panther *Update*

February 2011

Field Stories

Florida Panther 148: Surviving on the Edge of Civilization

Article and Visuals by **Dave Onorato**, Associate Research Scientist, FWC

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) handled FP148's den on January 17th. FP148 was initially captured by the FWC in March of 2006. She was one of the first panthers to be captured and collared in the South Belle Meade area of the Picayune Strand State Forest (PSSF, see map). Belle Meade is somewhat unique panther habitat. Panthers using this area encounter different challenges from those located in the middle of large tracts of public land like Big Cypress National Preserve or the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge. Southern Belle Meade is bounded to the north by the stretch of Alligator Alley that does not have any fencing or wildlife underpasses, so this poses a hazard for panthers attempting to move between habitat to the north and south of the Alley. To the west, CR951 creates a dangerous barrier to panthers that may inadvertently risk venturing into the few remnant plots of woods in East Naples. There is also development along this western edge of Belle Meade, including rock mines, apartment complexes, golf courses, and single family homes. Imagine the experiences and ordeals FP148 might undergo as she utilizes the "civilized" portions of her home range to survive.



FP148, a 6.5 year old female Florida panther, lies sedated during data collection within the Belle Meade portion of the Picayune Strand State Forest (29 January 2010).

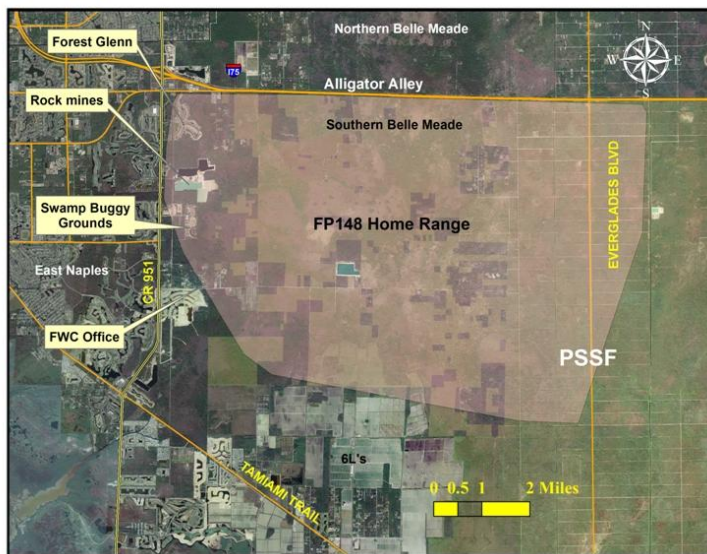
with FP148 for almost three years. None of her kittens from the 2007 litter were encountered again; their fate unknown (a common scenario with panther kittens).

In January of 2010, the FWC capture team treed an uncollared female in Belle Meade, just three miles northeast of their new office on Sabal Palm Road. Upon darting the female and scanning her for a transponder tag, the mystery female turned out to be none other than FP148. Since her recapture, FP148 seems to still be using the same general home range.



Male Kittens of FP148 Lie Nestled Among Dead Ferns in a Cypress Strand

FP148's movement patterns noted during routine telemetry flights in early January 2011 indicated she may be denning. This panther mom had selected a den site in the midst of a large patch of cypress with a relatively dense understory of dead ferns that were five feet high. This same area is very wet during most of the year and would not be a good choice for a den site. But, during the dry season, it proved to be very suitable denning habitat in the eyes of FP148. Her den housed two male kittens, approximately twelve days old. FP148 continues to demonstrate to us through her movements and den site selections that panthers must be adaptable to survive, mate, and reproduce on the edge of developed lands.



Map of FP148's home range. Note how the western edge of her home range abuts East Naples and a variety of other types of development. In addition, the barrier posed by Alligator Alley is evident by her lack of movements into North Belle Meade.

During her first stint as a GPS collared panther for FWC, FP148 roamed throughout all of Southern Belle Meade. She eventually paired up with male FP146 and in January of 2007, produced a litter of three kittens. Not too long afterward, her GPS collar released (as programmed for data collection) and we lost touch

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2010/2011 Panther Capture Season is Underway

Winter in Florida is the best time for researchers to capture and collar panthers mainly for safety reasons. Most importantly, the cooler temperatures help keep the panther from overheating during the process. The FWC capture season started on November 1, 2010 and runs through the end of February. Through January they logged 29 hunt days (no capture work took place in December). Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP) conducts a one month capture season in February.

FWC Captures through January 2011

Date	ID	Sex	Age(yrs)	Location
11/3/10	FP183	M	4	Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge
11/8/10	FP184	F	3-4	Big Cypress National Preserve - Add Lands
11/10/10	FP163	M	3	Big Cypress National Preserve - Add Lands
11/15/10	FP185	F	1.5-2	Private Ranch Land
1/10/11	FP186	M	7-8 mo	CREW - Flint Pen Strand

(Table Provided by Panther Biologist Mark Lotz)

Kittens and Mortalities: The month of January brought three kitten litters and five panther deaths. See FWC's Panther Pulse for details: www.floridapanther.net.org/index.php/pulse/ and watch for a story in the March Panther Update on FP175's kittens which were handled on January 27 by BCNP.



FP175's Kittens K319 and K320 ©Ralph Arwood

Florida Photographer Marvels at an Extraordinary Panther Sighting

On January 2, Heather Green took a ride along W.J. Janes Memorial Scenic Drive in the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park. It ended up being a day she will never forget. She tells the story and shares the photos in her blog: heathergreenblog.com/2011/01/03/finally-my-first-florida-panther-sighting/

To celebrate her experience, Heather created a free panther desktop wallpaper download available through this link: heathergreenblog.com/2011/01/26/freebie-florida-panther-desktop-wallpaper/



Panther Kitten on Janes, Early January ©Heather Green

SAVE THE DATES! 2011 **Florida Panther Week** runs from March 12 to 19. The all new, first annual **Florida Panther Festival** is scheduled to take place Saturday, October 29, 2011 at the North Collier Regional Park.

Notices and Links

January 18 - Naples Daily News ran an editorial with one of a sequence of five broad-daylight photos made of a Florida panther by a motion-activated camera in an underpass under Corkscrew Road in Estero. The camera is sponsored by Florida Gulf Coast University's Panther Posse Program.

www.naplesnews.com/news/2011/jan/18/editorial-fgcu-panther-posse-program/

January 10 - FWC News Release, "Panther-death numbers little changed in 2010" compares the 23 documented panther mortalities in 2010 to the 25 deaths of 2009.

www.myfwc.com/NEWSROOM/11/statewide/News_11_X_PantherDeaths2010.htm

December 2010 - FWC released a "Statement on Estimating Panther Population Size" which is a clarification document addressing the challenges with developing population estimates and describing the methods currently in use by the FWC to provide an estimated lower and upper population bound for Florida panthers.

Statement: www.myfwc.com/NEWSROOM/Resources/News_Resources_PantherPopSizeEst.htm

FAQs: www.myfwc.com/NEWSROOM/Resources/News_Resources_PantherPopSizeEstFAQs.htm

Florida Panther Update Partnership This newsletter is made possible through the efforts of the following agencies:

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) www.floridapanther.net.org

Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP) www.nps.gov/bicy

Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge (FPNWR) www.fws.gov/floridapanther



Updates are Compiled and Distributed by Roxann Hanson, Refuge Volunteer

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